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ABSTRACT

A practicum was designed to improve the quality of peer interactions among seventh and eighth graders in a private elementary-secondary school. The goals of the practicum were to facilitate positive peer interactions among the middle school students, create a more positive atmosphere in the middle school, and develop positive attitudes toward working together in classroom projects. Surveys were administered to teachers and students before and after implementation of the practicum components. Inservice programs addressing the needs of adolescents were implemented for the teachers, counseling groups were organized for interested students, the Friday night activities for students were planned. Comparison of responses to the pre- and post-questionnaires completed by both teachers and students revealed that there was a positive change in the quality of interactions among the middle school students and that students were more cooperative in working together on group projects following implementation of the practicum. (Author/NB)

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DEVELOPING ING POSITIVE PEER RELATIONSHIPS IN MIDDLE SC SCHOOL USING INSERVICE TRAINING, GROUP W P WORK AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

by

Ruth S. Innes

Cluster XVII

A Practicum I Rep Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program in Ear Early and Middle Childhood in Partial F al Fulfillment of the Requirements for the De e Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1989

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This practicum report was submitted by Ruth S. Innes under the direction of the advisor listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved: _____
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Date of Final Approval of Report

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ABSTRACT

Developing Positive Peer Relationships. Innes, Ruth S., 1989: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Peer Relationships/Middle School Students/Adolescent Peer Groups/Peer Interactions.

This practicum was designed to improve the quality of peer interactions in a middle school. The goals were to facilitate positive peer interactions among the middle school children, create a more positive atmosphere in the middle school and develop positive attitudes towards working together in classroom projects.

The writer administered surveys to the middle school teachers and to middle school students to determine the perceived student intereaction. The writer developed inservice programs for the teachers addressing the needs of adolescents, groups for the students and Friday night activities for the students.

The results of this practicum were positive. Analysis of the data indicated that there was a positive change in the quality of interactions among the middle school students and that the students were more cooperative in working together on group projects.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

This practicum took place in a private school located in an urban community of approximately 275,000 people. The community is located in the Southeastern United States and is considered a desirable place not only in which to live, but also as a place to vacation.

The economic structure is primarily tourism, banking and soft industry. Within the past thirty years the area has experienced extensive economic growth and the population base has become both younger and larger. The community celebrated its centennial this year and the city fathers foresee continued economic prosperity.

There are substantial minority group representations in the population. Blacks, Hispanics and Orientals are the primary minorities. Race relations appear fairly positive at this time.

The Writer's Work Setting

The school in which this practicum occurred is a coeducational independent college preparatory day school, inclusive of pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. It has been in the community since 1923 and presently has an enrollment of 850 students. The school moved to its

present twenty-eight acre campus in the early 1970's. At that time it expanded its program to include grades 9 through 12. Students commute from not only the immediate community but also from a 30 mile radius.

The majority of the students are from the business and professional community and represent substantially the upper middle to upper class white families. The minority population includes Hispanic, Oriental and Black students and these groups compise 8% of the school's population. Since the curriculum is college preparatory in nature, the students are considered high average to above average in academic ability and plan to attend college upon graduation.

Scholarships for needy students are available as is a tuition refund program to assist parents with financial needs. Approximately 50 students receive aid, with a total scholarship budget of $135,000. The school has an annual budget of $3.5 million. Their annual giving campaign generates approximately $80,000. A building campaign was just completed and has raised $1.5 million to build a new middle and upper school campus. This will be completed within the next six years at the present site. The median teacher income is $14,500 and it is competitive in terms of teacher recruitment with other area independent schools.

The administrative team is comprised of the headmaster, the director of administrative services, the

three principals (lower, middle and upper school), the business manager, the director of guidance and counseling, the director of athletics, the director of development and director of maintenance. There is a staff of 84 with which the administrative team works.

The lower school includes a librarian, a reading specialist, a guidance counselor (shared with the middle school), a principal and teachers. The teachers from preschool through third grade maintain self contained classrooms. At the fourth grade level, teaching becomes specialized. The teachers in grades four through six move from room to room, rather than the students. Eighty percent of the teachers in grades pre-kindergarten through six are certified by the state.

The middle school staff includes a guidance counselor (shared with the lower school), a principal and teachers. The librarian is shared with the upper school. The middle school students use the library located on the upper school campus. Some teachers teach both middle school and upper school classes. They teach according to their specialty, and 60% of them are certified by the state in their subject area.

The upper school staff includes a principal, a guidance counselor (who is the director of guidance and counseling for the school) and teachers. As is indicated above, several teachers teach both middle and upper school classes. Approximately 70% of the teachers are certified

by the state in their subject area.

Faculty turnover is relatively low and morale is fairly good. There has been a commitment made by the board of trustees to increase faculty salaries considerably over the next three years. The present salaries fall slightly below the median range described by the National Association of Independent Schools.

The Writer's Role and Responsibilities

The writer is the director of guidance and counseling. Responsibilities include the counseling of all high school students (220) and overseeing the guidance programs in grades kindergarten through 8. The writer works closely with the lower and middle school counselor, assisting in the development of appropriate counseling skills for the students. The writer is responsible for college placement and works extensively with the students concerning this decision. Concentration on college selection while discussed from ninth grade, is found in grades 11 and 12.

The writer is responsible for all standardized testing given in the upper school and the counseling of the upper school students. This includes personal, academic and social concerns. The writer maintains active membership in appropriate professional organizations.

The writer's academic preparation includes a Bachelor of Science in history and social studies, with certification in history, social studies and English. She

has a Master of Arts degree in Sociology and another Master of Arts degree in counselor education. The writer has an Educational Specialist degree in counselor education and is certified in guidance and counseling for grades Kindergarten through Junior College. The writer is a licensed mental health counselor and presently has a private counseling practice in the city. She has been director of guidance and counseling at this school for 10 years. Prior to that she was director of guidance and counseling for two years at another private school in the same city.

The writer has written several articles on counseling and college admissions for professional journals and has been a speaker at numerous conventions and workshops that address the topic of counseling the adolescent.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Description of the Problem Situation

The middle school is defined as the seventh and eighth grades. It is this group of students that was the subject of this practicum. In the middle school it appeared that negative peer interaction was producing a negative environment. The teachers, principal and guidance counselor recognized this problem. Specifically, the staff indicated that students appeared to pick on each other during lunch and break times, certain groups excluded fellow classmates, group projects were difficult to implement effectively, and the physical education teachers found little enthusiasm among the students for participation in group and/or team sports.

The faculty and staff wanted to see more cooperation among the students, both in the classroom and in athletic and extra-curricular activities. It was hoped that the development of a more positive atmosphere in the middle school with the students being more tolerant of individual differences would create a more relaxed, positive learning atmosphere.

Problem Documentation

In the spring of 1988, a survey was given to the

principal, guidance counselor, and the teachers (see Appendix A). Thirteen teachers were involved in this survey. The majority indicated that they perceived a lack of cooperation in the classroom and that in most cases, project work was difficult to implement effectively. Teachers stated that "meism" and the great emphasis on individual academic achievement by both the school and the homes was a possible factor.

Cliques as a detrimental factor in developing positive peer interactions were seen by 10 teachers as existing, with exclusion based on socio/economic class, academic achievement, athletic ability and/or popularity. They felt that most students were not "kind" to each other. All felt that there were students who were isolated socially and that this isolation was not by choice. The physical education/coaching staff responded that there appeared to be more concern with individual performance than with group cooperation and team performance.

In one faculty meeting held during the school year, the subject of peer interactions had been discussed. Concern was voiced over the lack of volunteerism, poor attendance at social events, comments by the students that indicated that they were not coming back, and the general negative atmosphere.

Parent conferences also reflected this concern. Conferences held with the principal and/or the teachers

concerning adjustment to middle school focused on negative remarks that students made to each other, and a seeming lack of positive social interaction in the middle school.

Causative Analysis

The problem of negative peer relationships in the middle school had a number of causes. One cause was the low level of self esteem that the middle school students (early adolescence) generally have for themselves. At best, the middle school student is tenative about his/her identity and hence, finds it difficult to relate positively to peers. This is enhanced by the competitive atmosphere of the middle school. In a college preparatory school, emphasis is placed on academic achievement. Since academic success is an indication of "success" at this school, students often feel compelled to strive for outstanding grades.

Social status (real or imagined) among the students was another factor contributing to the lack of positive peer interactions. The population of the school, as has been indicated, primarily consists of upwardly mobile families (i.e., the business and professional community). There appeared to be concern among the students about appropriate attire and being a member of certain clubs and/or organizations. As a result the students had the tendency to be critical of each other in terms of dress, families and social activities. Exclusion from parties was a significant trauma suffered by some students.

The middle school teachers and their lack of sensitivity to the needs of this age group contributed to the problems being addressed. As the school year progressed, the teachers became involved with classroom teaching and trying to cover the subject matter in the allotted time. As a result, sensitivity to the quality of peer interactions in the classroom diminished and teachers became frustrated with the lack of cooperation. The classroom teacher needed to not only be aware of the interactive issues with which the students were coping, but also to have knowledge of how he/she could effect change by using a different approach to group projects and cooperation in the classroom.

Literature Review

The subject of adolescent peer interaction and its implications on present and future behavior and perceptions has been an area of inquiry that a number of researchers have explored. Kissar and Hagerdorn (1979) have commented on the far reaching effects of peer perceptions and indicate that this perception influences not only the present conception of self, but also the adult perception. There appears to be not a considerable change in one's self perception as one moves from adolescence to adulthood. A similar implication was made by Perez (1983) who studied the influence of the adolescent peer group. He concluded that positive or negative interactions are significant for future adult as

well as for present adolescent relationships.

Waltman (1987) indicates that there is a need for intimate peer relationships for the pre-early adolescent for the purpose of reassurance. Reassurance in terms of others understanding the biological and social changes that are occurring. Communication from the adolescent's peers that things are 'ok' is of significant importance.

Self esteem and peer group affiliation were studied by Brown and Lohr (1987). They examined the self esteem of 221 seventh through twelfth grade students who were associated and identified by their peers with one of the five major school crowds. This group was compared with 106 students who were relatively unknown and not affiliated with any school crowd. The results indicated that self esteem was directly related to the position of one's crowd. Outsiders' self esteem was less positive than the crowd members.

Peer relationships as a major contributor to feelings of loneliness was addressed by Asher (1984). He identified dissatisfaction with peer relations as being counter-productive to the development of cohesive groups. Zarb (1981) has implied that popularity and inclusion are often more significant and sought after than good grades. Crockett, Losoff and Peterson (1984) found that among younger adolescents both males and females considered daily interactions with peers most important. A substantial portion of their time was used in tryng to

develop positive relationships with their peers. Asbridge (1984), in a study of adolescent peer group membership, found that the subjects valued acceptance by their peers and would often forfeit good behavior for peer acceptance.

Rubenstein and Shaver (1980), in a study of self reported loneliness, indicated that loneliness peaks in adolescence and appeared to decline with increased age. Dobson, et al (1987), in a study of loneliness, perception of school and grade point average found that there was an inverse relationship between the student's self reported loneliness and satisfaction with school. Those who reported higher levels of loneliness indicated that they had social experiences of a poorer quality with their peers and teachers, and had less involvement in extracurricular activities, more negative reactions to teachers, and a low level of commitment to school work.

In a counseling survey of 523 sixth, seventh and eighth grade students, Zachow and Carter (1985) found that the students were primarily concerned with appearance (i.e., weight and physical development), their personality and intellect as it related to others (temper, making mistakes, not being included) and getting poor grades. It is interesting to note that the number one concern was physical appearance. Baum and Forehand (1984) in their study found that the adolescent subjects perceived physical attractiveness as a significant influence on the quality and type of peer relationships formed. Their

study also indicated that athletic ability was favorable and an asset to peer acceptance. Scheidlinger (1984) concluded that successful athletes received high visibility among their peers and were given more accessibility to valued peer group membership than their non-participating peers.

Thornberg (1980) has identified three important developmental characteristics of early adolescents and comments on their importance and the necessity of middle school teachers to be knowledgeable in this area. The characteristics are (a) a high need for peer friendship, (b) a rising awareness of increased physical changes, and (c) a strong concern with how they match up to common behavioral or physical stereotypes. He comments that the teachers must be aware of these developmental characteristics as well as the students' learning characteristics in order to effectively reach this age bracket. Learning must include the need for social contact.

It appears that recent research validates the importance of positive adolescent peer interactions for present positive self esteem, the alleviation of loneliness, and the formation of a positive adult self image. Furthermore, the issue of popularity is crucial among asolescents and, in fact, may be more important than grades. Hence, the development of an environment that enhances positive peer interaction may also assist

students in the attainment of better academic achievement since they would not have to make a choice between popularity and grades.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVLUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals were projected for this practicum:

1. Students in grades 7 and 8 would interact more positively with each other. This change would be reflected in more cooperation among the students, observable by faculty and staff.

2. Individual differences would be respected and students would more readily become involved in group activities.

Behavioral Expectations

There were two behavioral expectations anticipated as a result of this practicum:

1. The students in grades 7 and 8 would be more positive in relating to their peers. They would reflect mutual respect and an acceptance of individual differences.

2. There would be an increase in positive participation in classroom activities.

Measurement of Objectives

The above two expectations were to be measured in the following manner:

Expectation I - Positive peer interactions among seventh and eighth graders will be evident. Students will be accepting of individual differences and exhibit mutual respect for each other.

The faculty was given a questionnaire (see Appendix A) in May, 1988, which addressed the issue of student relationships. The teachers were given this in a faculty meeting and had 15 minutes in which to complete it. The purpose of this questionnaire was explained to the participants and the proposed practicum described. The results were tabulated. Table 1 indicates the responses.

Table 1

Teacher Questionnaire Addressing Peer Interactions
Pre-Practicum Response

Issue Addressed (a)	May Results (b)
1. Cooperation in class	3 yes
2. Classroom projects	3 yes
3. Negative Interactions	7 negative 5 mixed 3 positive
4. Cliques	15 yes
5. Influence of cliques	3 positive
6. Exclusion	12 excluded
7. Social isolation	15 yes
8. Isolated by choice	15 no
9. Kind to each other	2 yes

(a) by questions from survey (see appendix A)
(b) total number responding = 15

The intended overall results predicted a change in the responses so that at least 9 of the teachers would observe cooperation and positive relationships among the students.

This questionnaire was to be administered to the teachers again at the end of the practicum. The results were to be tabulated and compared with the May, 1988, results.

The students were to be given a similar questionnaire (see Appendix B) prior to the beginning of the practicum. The student population included those who participated in the group sessions. The questionnaire was given during the first group meeting. At that time the purpose of the questionnaire was explained. The students had 15 minutes in which to complete it. This questionnaire was repeated at the completion of the practicum. The results were to be tabulated and compared.

Expectation II - There will be an increase in positive participation in classroom activities.

This was to be measured by the use of a survey given to the teachers. The initial administration of the survey was to be done the week immediately prior to the implementation of the practicum. The survey was to be administered again at the end of the practicum. The survey was to be given to the teachers in faculty meetings and 15 minutes were allotted to complete the questionnaire. The results were to be tabulated and compared.

Rationale for Use of the Survey

The evaluation instrument selected for this practicum was the survey. This form of evaluation is used extensively in education because of the wide range of educational problems that can be addressed (Borg and Gall, 1983). The changes in student interactions and classroom participation were measured by assessing the students' opinions concerning behavior prior to the practicum and after the implementation of the practicum. Aiken (1976) has indicated that one measures opinions by the use of surveys, in which the population responds to specific questions on issues. This practicum assessed the opinions of students and staff as to interactions among students, both in and out of the classroom. Hence, the use of the survey.

The surveys developed were:

a. Two questionnaires for the teachers and staff.

b. One questionnaire for the students who participated in the group work.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Possible Solutions

Possible solutions for effecting change in adolescent peer interactions have been developed by numerous researchers. Dobson et al (1987), in a study of peer interactions, suggest that the development of small adolescent groups who address the issues of peer interactions and loneliness are effective. McCaleb (1978) feels that group counseling sessions are effective in dealing with adolescent interaction issues and suggests that in the groups, activities that focus on role taking should be incorporated. The value in this procedure is that it will assist the student in developing a sensitivity to the needs of others, hence facilitating positive peer interactions.

Bowman (1986) suggests the use of a peer facilitator program to help students reach out to each other, cope with critical issues and help develop positive peer relationships. In this type of a program, however, it is important to carefully screen the students and to develop a carefully planned training program for the selected students.

Dobson et al (1987) emphasize the importance of staff

development time to focus on how to establish a positive classroom climate that will promote cooperation among the students. The teachers learn cooperative activities to incorporate in the classroom that will supplement the traditional teaching methods.

Salimbene (1981) describes the use of group interaction exercises in the classroom to facilitate self esteem, self reliance and group cohesiveness. The development of group cooperation and competitiveness with the students' acceptance of individual differences are the goals of Salimbene's approach. Involved in this approach is the training of the classroom teachers so that they may effectively incorporate these methods in the curriculum.

Slavin (1986) indicates that using the "team approach" in the classroom to address such social variables as mutual concern and peer support for academic performance can reduce classroom tension and the focus on individual achievement at the expense of one's peers. By developing groups of "teams" in the classroom, each member develops a sense of identity with that team and therefore assists each other member so that he/she may be successful as a team.

The Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale has been incorporated in numerous programs that focus on peer relationships. Waas (1984) and Fagan (1980) discuss the use of this in conjunction with a sociometric test of friendship. It appeared that interpersonal relationships

among adolescents were more positive when the locus of control was primarily internal. It is suggested that one incorporate this measure in programs that deal with peer relationships.

The review of the literature suggests that the involvement of teachers as well as the students is crucial if one is to effect change among students. Developing a more cooperative classroom atmosphere through the use of group work and a team approach required interaction with the teachers, staff and students. This practicum required the support of the parents; i.e., they had to give permission for their children to participate in the group work.

Selected Solution

The selected solution to this issue had three parts:

1. Inservice programs for the teachers.

2. Counseling groups for the seventh and eighth grade students (maximum of 15 to a group).

3. Scheduled school activities for seventh and eighth grade students.

Report of Action Taken

Inservice Training

In order to assist the teachers in developing a sensitivity to the needs of adolescents, there were three inservice programs. The sessions addressed the topics of cooperation, peer interaction and self esteem. The topics were discussed and related to the classroom. The first

session was held at the onset of the practicum. This session lasted two hours. The results of the spring teacher questionnaire were distributed and discussed (see Table 1, p. 16). It was explained that as a result of the perceived needs, a three faceted approach to creating change was developed. Specifically, this included three inservice days for teachers, group work with the seventh and eighth graders, and student activities. The list of activities planned for the students was handed out (see Appendix F).

The rest of the first session addressed the subject of adolescent behavior. The physical, emotional and social uncertainties of this age group were presented and discussed. Lively discussion centered around the emotional "ups and downs" of adolescents and insight was gained by the teachers in terms of the uncertainty that adolescents have about themselves. One teacher commented that the crises that adolescents go through are known to us all, but that at times we lose our sensitivity to the needs of adolescents due to our own needs.

Peer relationships and the importance of having positive interaction with one's peers were discussed. The issue of loneliness and the adolescent was examined and the consenses was that indeed adolescence is a difficult, lonely time and that a teacher can help the students with this if he or she is sensitive and keeps an awareness of the student's concerns.

Positive ways of dealing with the middle school students were discussed. The importance of praise and encouragement, creating a positive environment in the classroom and ways to promote cooperation among the students were examined. At the conclusion of this first inservice program, the teachers indicated enthusiasm and interest.

The second inservice day was held during the sixth week of implementation. It was two hours in length even though it was scheduled to be only one hour. The first 30 minutes were spent discussing what had been occurring in the classrooms and teacher comments. It was expressed that the teachers were more aware of the interactions going on with the student, identified some "problem" students and suggested ways that they (the teachers) could assist these students.

The Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Inventory was discussed and it was explained that this inventory was to be given to the student groups to attain a better understanding of the students' perception of how much control they (the students) have over their lives in terms of selecting friends and appropriate behavior. Several faculty members commented that they would like to be given the adult version.

The rest of the session addressed self esteem. The self esteem scale used in the student groups (see Appendix E) was administered to the faculty. It was then discussed

and out of this discussion came suggestions as to how teachers could promote positive self esteem in the classroom. Some of the suggestions were:

1. Compliment the students on their accomplishments (no matter how small).
2. Refrain from a negative approach to poor work (i.e., drop the use of such phrases as "bad work", "careless" "you certainly aren't trying today", etc.).
3. Develop a positive repertoire that addresses class work that needs improvement.
4. Encourage individual thought in the classroom and the acceptance of other students' points of view.

The third inservice day was held during the twelfth week of implementation. This session was one hour in length. At this session there was a review of the program completed with the students. The teacher questionnaire was regiven. In this session the teachers indicated that they had gained a lot from the workshops. They indicated that they would like to have ongoing inservice programs that address the needs of the students. It was indicated that the workshops made them aware that school must address more than just academics in order to be effective.

Counseling groups for
Seventh and Eighth Grade Students

The preliminary procedures in the developing of this

part of the solution involved the determination of what would be an appropriate time for the group work. This was accomplished in a meeting with the middle school principal and guidance counselor prior to the beginning of school. It was determined that the groups would meet once a week for 12 consecutive weeks and that the students would be self selected. All students in grades seven and eight had the opportunity to join the groups. A letter (see Appendix D) was sent home two weeks prior to the scheduled implementation asking parents to give permission so that their child could join the groups if so desired.

The students were assigned to the groups according to grade level. There were 26 seventh graders and 28 eighth graders who participated. Each grade level was divided evenly into two groups; i.e., the seventh grade groups had 13 in each, and the eighth grade groups had 14 in each. Each group met once a week during seventh period for 12 consecutive weeks.

The sessions addressed mutual respect, individual differences, self-esteem, locus of control, and kindness to fellow students. The groups were lively, especially the discussion about individual differences. Such issues as why one should respect people different than themselves, how to act toward a person who is less attractive, poorer (or richer), or less friendly resulted in discussions focusing on how one evaluates people before one really gets to know them.

The self esteem session was well received and the students expressed their often tentative feelings about how good they were and/or how they perceived that they were evaluated by other students. Insight was gained in understanding that no one was alone in feeling insecure or not good enough. Much discussion was held concerning how one could communicate better with one's peers and how to gain some understanding of how the other person feels.

The two sessions focusing on the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control were of less interest to the students. While they were interested in discovering how they felt about being in control of situations, this exercise did not elicit thought provoking discussions. Several students indicated that they would like just to discuss what their feelings were rather than have them scaled.

The last topic discussed was kindness. This was placed at the end of the group work because kindness to others is actually the goal that one reaches after developing self esteem and a sensitivity to individual differences.

In the beginning of this session the students were asked to brainstorm what kindness was. After a few answers such as "being nice to a person in order to get something from him" and "making believe you really like someone because you have to", the students started to explore what kindness really is. Several students in each group indicated that kindness was what happens if you feel

good about yourself and respect other people. In the next session, discussion centered around application of kindness to everyday life. How one treats parents, friends, and teachers was discussed. It was mentioned that it really is easier to be kind to people than to be mean. The importance of feeling good about one's self was emphasized.

The final (twelfth) session was spent discussing what the students had learned in the groups. Many indicated that they learned a lot about themselves and why they act the way they do. Another frequent response focused on how they now understand why other students feel as they do. A frequent response was: "I thought I was the only one who felt like that." There was a sense of relief tha they were "normal". Finally, the student questionnaire that was given at the beginning of the group sessions was regiven.

Development of School Activities

Activities specifically planned for the seventh and eighth graders began during the second week of implementation. These activities were held on Friday nights. The events included three movie nights, three dances, a scavenger hunt, a "lock in", a hayride and barbeque, a beach party, and a costume party. The attendance was best on the movie nights (generally 50 students each night) and for the "lock in". The movies were selected by the student body a week prior to the

actual event. Perhaps this factor (i.e., student selection) was the reason the attendance was better. The "lock in", which is an all night social where the students bring sleeping bags and spend the night in the gym, attracted 58 students. This event had the highest attendance. The costume party had the least attendance, with 25 students.

The above solution and its three facets were selected because it appeared to be the most appropriate for the school and hence, the easiest to fit into the school day and into ongoing programs.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

Upon completion of the implementation of this practicum, data was collected, evaluated and compared. The following results were noted:

1. The students in grades seven and eight related more positively to their peers. They exhibited mutual respect and an acceptance of individual differences. This was reflected in the data compiled from the questionnaires given to the faculty and the students (see appendices A and B). Both were given prior to the implementation of the practicum and repeated at the conclusion of implementation.

Results of the teacher pre and post questionnaire indicate a substantial positive change in the perception of peer interactions. The number of teachers observing positive interactions among students went from 3 out of 15 prior to implementation to 12 out of 15 after the implementation. Cliques appeared to decrease. Observed cliques preimplementation was indicated by 15 teachers while post practicum observation indicated 5 out of 15 observed cliques. Kindness was observed by more teachers (12) after the implementation than before the

implementation (2). Table 2 enumerates the faculty responses.

Table 2

Comparison of Teacher Perception of Student Interactions Pre and Post Implementation[a]

Question	Pre	Response	Post
Cooperation in class	3	Yes	11
	12	No	4
Classroom projects	3	Yes	10
	11	No	5
	1	No Comment	0
Negative interractions	3	Positive	12
	7	Negative	1
	5	Mixed	2
Cliques	15	Yes	5
	0	No	10
Influence of cliques	3	Positive	11
	10	Negative	4
	2	No Comment	0
Exclusion	12	Yes	9
	3	No	6
Social isolation	15	Yes	7
	0	No	8
Isolated by choice	0	Yes	6
	15	No	9
Kind to each other	2	Yes	12
	10	No	3
	3	No Comment	0
In athletics and organized activities do students work as team or individuals[b]	8	Individual	5
	1	Group	4

[a]Responses to questionnaire in Appendix A

[b]Nine coaches responded

The results of the student questionnaire indicated that there was substantial perceived increase in positive student interactions. Pre implementation responses indicated that 10 out of 54 students felt that their peers were friendly, with 25 out of 54 responding that their peers were not friendly. Post implementation responses indicated that 30 out of 54 perceived their peers as friendly, with 10 out of 54 perceiving that they were not friendly.

Attitudes toward class project work changed significantly. Pre implementation results indicated that 10 out of 54 would feel "comfortable" working together with peers, while post implementation results indicated that 47 out of 54 would feel comfortable.

Table 3 enumerates each response pre and post. As is indicated, there were significant changes in perception after implementation.

Table 3

Comparison of Students Perceptions of Peer Interactions: Pre and Post Implementation[a]

Question	Response Pre	Response Category	Response Post
Grade level	26	7 Grade	26
	28	8th Grade	28
Most students at school are	10	Friendly	30
	25	Not Friendly	10
	12	Sort of Friendly	13
	7	Sort of Unfriendly	1
I like most of the students	24	Yes	45
	30	No	9
Working with other students on class projects	10	Comfortable	47
	30	Nervous	7
	14	Not Participate	0
Respect for classmates who are different	12	Yes	40
	4	No	0
	38	Sometimes	14
Attempt to know and understand classmates who are different	4	Always	38
	12	Never	1
	14	Sometimes	10
	24	When Forced	3
Do you feel left out of certain groups?	48	Yes	14
	4	No	40
Is belonging to the right group important?	25	All the Time	4
	2	Not at All	11
	27	At Certain Times	39
The atmosphere of classes is	14	Positive	44
	38	Negative	10

[a]Response to student questionnaires in Appendix B

2. An increase in positive participation in classroom activities was indicated by the teachers. This was reflected in the data compared from the second questionnaire that was given to the faculty pre and post implementation of the practicum. Table 4 enumerates the results of this questionnaire.

Table 4

Faculty Perception of Classroom Interaction: Pre and Post Implementation[a]

Question	Pre[b]	Response	Post[b]
Atmosphere of class	6	Positive	1
	6	Negative	2
	3	Ambivalent	2
Percentage of students eager to do class projects	9	20%	0
	4	40%	2
	1	60%	8
	1	80%	4
	0	100%	1
Reluctance to assign class projects	8	Yes	1
	3	No	7
	4	Depends	7
Respect students have for their peers	8	20%	0
	4	40%	3
	3	60%	12
	0	80%	0
Academic achievement is of primary to what percentage of your students	0	20%	0
	0	40%	0
	2	60%	2
	9	80%	9
	4	100%	4
Social acceptance is of primary importance to what percentage of your students	0	20%	0
	0	40%	0
	4	60%	5
	6	80%	8
	5	100%	2

[a]Response to faculty questionnaire in Appendix C

[b]Indicates teacher responses - total number of teachers surveyed was 15

The results indicate that classroom participation at the conclusion of the implementation was more positive and that students were less reluctant to get involved in group activities.

Unexpected results of the practicum were:

1. Informal peer support groups were started.

2. Conflicts in sports and other activities limited student participation in group work.

3. Teachers requested continued inservice programs addressing the characteristics and needs of the adolescent.

Conclusions

The results of this practicum indicated that intervention with students and teachers through group work, inservice programs and social events significantly affected peer interaction in the seventh and eighth grades. However, it is important to note that the group of students involved was self selected (i.e., parents' permission). The 54 participants represented 46% of the student body. Total students in seventh and eighth grades are 120.

The inservice programs were successful and the teachers indicated that they wanted to continue the workshops all year. The inservice program was more successful than was anticipated. It is the writer's opinion that this facet of the practicum was most crucial.

It is necessary to have an inservice program for the teachers as well as student groups. If only one of the significant populations is reached, only one part of the problem will be addressed. It was most interesting to observe the simultaneous growth in both teacher and student awareness of others as well as of one's self.

The social activities were attended by an average of 40 students per night. The more popular events were movies and the lock in. The effect of the activities are more difficult to assess since they were open to all students in grades seven and eight, not just those enrolled in the groups.

Recommendations

The teacher inservice programs are crucial to this practicum. It is suggested that they be expanded to a year long program.

The student groups were well received. However, the groups are self selective and must be approved by the parents. It is suggested that if possible the groups become a required part of the seventh and eighth grade curriculum. Perhaps this could be done with the physical education classes. If this were accomplished, then all would benefit from the group experience.

The effectiveness of the social activities is questionable. It would appear that this part could be eliminated without a substantial change in the effect of the program.

Plans for Dissemination

The writer plans to present the results of the practicum to the local counselor's association. It is also planned to present it at the regional meeting of the American Association for Counseling and Development. The results were presented to the faculty and staff at the conclusion of the implementation.

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APPENDIX A

Peer Interaction Survey

Teachers: It has been brought to our attention that you are concerned with the presence of negative peer interaction in the middle school. In order to address this issue and effect change, we would appreciate it if you would complete this survey and leave it in my office. Thank you.

Ruth Innes

1. In the classroom do you feel that there is cooperation among the students; i.e., do they help each other?

_____ Yes

_____ No

2. In classroom projects do your students cooperate with each other?

_____ Yes

_____ No

Please comment on your answer

3. During lunch and break do you observe negative or positive interactions among the students?

_____ Positive

_____ Negative

_____ Mixed

Please comment on your answer with specific examples if possible

4. Do you see cliques present in the middle school?

_____ Yes

_____ No

If you answered "yes" to question 4, please answer 5 and 6.

5. Do these cliques exert a positive or negative infuence on the rest of the students?

_____ Positive

_____ Negative

6. Do these cliques purposely exclude certain students?

_____ Yes

_____ No

If yes, on what basis is exclusion made?

7. Do you find students who are isolated socially in the middle school?

_____ Yes

_____ No

8. Do you feel that this isolation is by choice?

_____ Yes

_____ No

9. Do you feel that the students are generally "kind" to each other, facilitating social and academic growth?

_____ Yes

_____ No

Please comment on your answer.

10. In athletics and organized activities do you find the students work as a team or an individuals competing against each other?

Please comment on your answer.

11. What do you feel would help promote positive interaction among your students?

thank you!!

APPENDIX B

Student Questionnaire

I am a student in grade:

_____ Seven

_____ Eight

1. Most of the students at school are:

_____ Friendly

_____ Not friendly

_____ Sort of friendly

_____ Sort of unfriendly

2. I like most of the students here:

_____ Yes

_____ No

3. If I had to do a class project or be on a team with other people in my class, I would feel:

_____ Comfortable

_____ Nervous

_____ I would rather not participate

4. Do you respect classmates who are different than you?

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Sometimes

5. Do you try to get to know and understand classmates who are different than you?

_____ Always _____ Sometimes

_____ Never _____ Only when forced

6. Do you feel left out of certain groups?

_____ Yes

_____ No

7. Is belonging to the right group at school important?

_____ Yes, all of the time

_____ No, not at all

_____ Yes, at certain times (like before a dance or social event)

8. The atmosphere of your classes is:

_____ Positive

_____ Negative

APPENDIX C

Faculty Questionnaire

We are interested in getting your assesment of the interactive atmosphere in your classrooms. Last spring's survey indicated some concern with the quality of student interactions and the lack of cooperation among them. Based on your classroom observations, please respond to the following questions.

1. The general atmosphere of your classes is:

   _____ Positive

   _____ Negative

   _____ Ambivalent

2. What percentage of your students are eager to get involved in classroom projects:

   _____ 20% _____ 60% _____ 100%

   _____ 40% _____ 80%

3. Are you reluctant to assign class projects because you feel that the students will find it difficult to work together?

   _____ Yes, all the time

   _____ No, never

   _____ Depends on the class (explain)

4. Do you feel that your students respect their peers and are accepting of individual differences in the classroom?

_____ 20% of students _____ 60% of students

_____ 40% of students _____ 80% of students

5. Academic achievement is of primary to what percentage of your students:

_____ 20% _____ 60% _____ 100%

_____ 40% _____ 80%

6. Social acceptance is of primary importance to what percentage of your students:

_____ 20% _____ 60% _____ 100%

_____ 40% _____ 80%

APPENDIX D

Dear Parents:

During the fall semester, 1988, we will be organizing a series of small groups (ten to fifteen per group) that will meet once a week for a period of twelve weeks. The purpose of these is to work on positive peer interaction. Specifically, we will address self esteem, individual differences, mutual respect and cooperation.

We would like to have your son or daughter involved in this group experience. If your child is interested and you agree, please fill out the form at the bottom of this letter and return it to my office.

If you have any questions, please call me at 522-2111.

Sincerely,

Ruth S. Innes
Director of Guidance and
Counseling

I give my child, _____, permission to be in the middle school groups this fall.

_____
Signature of Parent

APPENDIX E

Self Esteem Inventory

1. What are your hobbies?

2. If you could someday have any job you wanted, what would it be? Why?

3. List three things that make you happy.

4. List three things that make you sad.

5. If you had three wishes, what would they be?

6. I am most easily hurt (finish the sentence)

7. I am afraid (finish the sentence)

8. Ten years from now I (finish the sentence)

9. What impresses you most about your (a) mother, (b) father, and (c) closest friend?

10. I could improve myself by (finish the sentence)

11. What subject do you like best? Why?

12. Your least liked subjects? Why?

13. Briefly describe "you" in five years.

APPENDIX F

Calendar of Social Events

These events took place on Friday night

Week 2	Movie Night
Week 3	Dance
Week 4	Scavenger Hunt
Week 5	"Lock In"
Week 6	Movie Night
Week 7	Hayride and Barbeque
Week 8	Dance
Week 9	Movie Night
Week 10	Beach Party
Week 11	Costume Party
Week 12	Dance